

OVEMBER, 1945

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This Month: Scenes from "Lady Windermere's Fan"



by Cecil Beaton

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Theatre World

(Incorporating PLAY PICTORIAL)

Vol. XLI
No. 250

Editorial and Advertising Offices:
1, DORSET BUILDINGS,
SALISBURY SQUARE, FLEET STREET,
LONDON, E.C.4 (Central 1555)

Subscription
13/6 per year
post free

Edited by Frances Stephens

November, 1945

Over the Footlights

It was significant that fresh discussions about the proposed National Theatre should arouse interest just at the time when the Old Vic launched their second brilliant season of repertory at the New, thus drawing forth the comment from one quarter at least that the spirit that should animate a true national theatre has little to do with bricks and mortar, or the location of a building, in or out of London. These are early days yet to say what will transpire in connection with the L.C.C. scheme for a National Theatre near the site of the old Globe on the south side of the Thames, but meantime we are quite content to walk with heads high to the present home of the Old Vic in St. Martin's Lane, confident that no finer or more truly "national" theatre is to be found anywhere in the English speaking world.

Several plays have been produced in the past week or so, too late for review in this number. The new Jack Hylton musical comedy, *Follow the Girls*, with Arthur Askey and Evelyn Dall, opened at His Majesty's on October 25th. They include also the new play about a prisoner-of-war camp at the Embassy called *Zoo in Silesia*, which brings Hugh Williams back to the theatre in the leading part. *The Forrigan Reel*, the new James Bridie-Cedric Thorpe Davie ballad comedy at Sadler's Wells, with Alastair Sim starring and producing, and the fifth programme of Grand Guignol plays by Frederic Witney at the Granville Theatre, with Jean Forbes Robertson, Alexander Archdale, Martin Walker and Bessie Love in the cast.

H. M. Tennent, Ltd., open a programme of eight new plays with *Grand National*

Night, by Dorothy and Campbell Christie, which they will present with Reandco and which, with Leslie Banks in the leading part, opens at Oxford, on November 19th.

Rehearsals have also begun of a new play by Warren Chetham Strode, which Jack Minster will direct and in which Robert Flemyng is to make his return to the stage after six years in the Army. Cecil Trouncer, Edith Sharpe, Sheila Sim, and Joan Hickson will also be in the cast.

Two plays which have been acquired with Linnit and Dunfee are *The Bells Ring Out*, by Joyce Dennys, to be directed by Richard Bird; and Warren Chetham Strode's new comedy *A Play for Ronnie*, in which Marjorie Fielding will appear when she has finished filming in *Quiet Weekend*.

The run of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* will be resumed next Spring, with Vivien Leigh in her original part.

It seems like old times to hear that C. B. Cochran is to present a new light opera in the New Year, entitled *Big Ben*, with lyrics by A. P. Herbert and music by Vivian Ellis.

Harold Fielding, the 27-year-old impresario, struck a new note with the popular concerts which ran for a month at Sadler's Wells. Starring Rawicz and Landauer, Albert Sandler and his Palm Court Orchestra, Gwen Catley, Robert Easton and Ronald Chesney in brightly-staged settings, the concerts certainly provided "music for the million." Mr. Fielding has many such concerts running in the provinces with great success, and it is his intention to find a West End theatre for what looks like proving a most popular form of entertainment.

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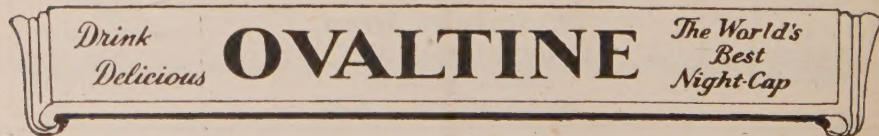


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P647A



New Shows of the Month

"Big Boy"

NO show with Fred Emney and Richard Hearne as the comedians could fail to get the laughs. They are an inimitable pair, a whole show in themselves. Actually the plot of this new show is rather more inane than is usual with musical comedy, minor is the music outstanding, and this puts a big burden on the stars. It says a lot for their skill that they triumph right up to the curtain.

In decorative support is lovely Carol Raye, surely our brightest and most versatile young musical comedy actress. The most charming item in the show is the *Maison Nicolette* Ballet, in which Miss Raye (dancing with feather-like grace) and the Freddie Carpenter dancers, get a big round of applause. But the chief honours go to the Emney-Hearne partnership. As Sir Frederick Bolsover, outsize, thriftless store owner, and Mr. Pastry, his faithful manager, they bounce through their adventures with amazing lightheartedness (Mr. Emney proportionately no less than the astoundingly acrobatic Mr. Hearne), and there is never a dull moment when they are on the stage.

Good support comes from Margaret Haldan as the Duchess of Lexe, and Ethel Edwards contributes a delicious study as an irate customer in Mr. Hearne's funniest scene.

The book is by Douglas Furber, Fred Emney and Max Kester, with music by Carol Gibbons. F.S.

"A Bell for Adano"

AMONG plays about aspects of the war, this adaptation of the John Hersey novel has much to commend it, and Robert Beatty in the leading part has more than confirmed the growing feeling that he is one of our most gifted younger actors. His portrayal of Major Joppolo is a living piece of work; the idealism and perplexity of the man in the face of the juggernaut that is war, is brought home to us in a piece of realistic acting which comes near to perfection.

Of course, this is Major Joppolo's play, and it says a lot for the big supporting company that they are not unduly overshadowed. The people of Adano, who grow to love the American Major (himself of Italian extraction) when he takes military control of their little town, are portrayed in warm Southern colours; perhaps a little exaggerated, but none the less the voluble peasants which we in these soberer parts imagine to abound in

"Big Boy"—Saville, September 12th.

"A Bell for Adano"—Phoenix, September 19th.

"The Rivals"—Criterion, September 25th.

"The Shouting Dies"—Lyric, Hammer-smith, October 5th.

"Fine Feathers"—Prince of Wales, October 11th.

Arts Theatre Festival of English Drama.

The Old Vic Theatre Company (Second Season)—New. (See page 22).

the remoter parts of remote Sicily. The other members of the American occupying force are authentic enough—again to our English ears, and for the rest the simple story of how the Major helps war ravaged Adano to its feet again, bringing a kindly philosophy to blast through the inhumanities of war, and of how he restores to the citizens the town bell they miss so much, at the moment he himself is disgraced for insubordination on their behalf, is moving in its sincerity.

We remember particularly Bonar Colleano's loyal sergeant, Frederick Valk's elemental and forceful fisherman and Gerard Kempinski's ex-Fascist Mayor.

F.S.

"The Rivals"

THE pillared intimacy of the little Criterion theatre, now released by the B.B.C., is the exact setting for *The Rivals* and this present production by Tennent Plays in association with C.E.M.A. is most worthily staged with its delightful Oliver Messel decor.

However, the company is not wholly successful in disguising Sheridan's artifice of plot in this particular play and we are left feeling that but for that "weather-beaten she-dragon," Mrs. Malaprop, the evening would have had its dull patches. Edith Evans sweeps all before her as that famous character and presents a mien so fearsome that her disordered speech does indeed seem genuine and not acquired. The other players have some difficulty in infusing reality into their parts though Reginald Beckwith's Bob Acres and Pauline Jameson's Lucy have humour and authenticity. Anthony Quayle appears as Captain Absolute but is sometimes too restrained in his acting. Audrey Fildes and Jean Wilson are decorative as Lydia and Julia while Morland Graham does not spare Sir Anthony his outbursts. Of the other characters we liked Charles Lamb's David, Peter Cushing's Faulkland and Bredon O'Rourke's Sir Lucius.

F.S.

"The Shouting Dies"

THE first play presented by the Company of Four at Hammersmith had more merit than the first night critics suggested but perhaps the chief weakness of the play was the theme, which struck one in many ways as inconsistent if not out-of-date.

The story is of a young American soldier's reactions to an ex-Nazi who has escaped to America from Germany and stolen the affection of his girl during his absence fighting on the Continent of Europe. The weakness is chiefly in the character of the German, who it seemed to me was not a typical Nazi, since he showed initiative enough to get to America when Germany's cause seemed lost; and in any case his retirement from politics and success as a farmer made him a character worth reforming. In such circumstances the American's treatment of the imposter when his true nationality is known looks very like lynching, and not at all in keeping with the Atlantic Charter.

We had no quarrel with the acting from John Slater and Gerard Hinze as the American and German rivals, Margaret Johnston as the girl, Joan Young and Walter Martin as her parents and Frederick Richter as a good German whose long years in America have left him untouched by the disease of German nationalism.

F.S.

"Fine Feathers"

FINE Feathers make fine birds but not necessarily fine revues; though I would not have missed the visit to the Prince of Wales Theatre for Jack Buchanan, Ethel Revnell and Douglas Wakefield triumph magnificently over some poor material. If the material had been as lavish as the decor and costumes and as workman-like as Robert Nesbitt's staging, this might have been a really big event.

Jack Buchanan's best number is "When Will They Liberate London" and the charm of his diffident manner is quite unimpaired in song, dance and sketch. Ethel Revnell, a comedienne of first rank, dominates the stage at every appearance; whether as Mistinguette, a baby in a play pen, or as Nell Gwynne, she is riotously funny. Douglas Wakefield, with Chuck O'Neil and Binny Nelson work manfully to amuse (Douglas Wakefield's Charles II is a grand bit of nonsense).

Jean Inglis is a charming newcomer in song and dance and there is considerable talent among the supporting company.

F.S.

Arts Theatre Festival

THE Arts, now well established as a theatre that really counts, is running another Festival until the end of the year.

The repertoire includes one of their previous productions, *The Constant Couple* (produced September 27th), in which Alec Clunes gives an outstanding performance as Wildair. Whether Mr. Clunes was justified in re-introducing this particular play is doubtful, though his own witty and graceful performance is worth the visit.

The Festival opened on September 5th with Shaw's comedy *Getting Married*, which is not, of course, one of his greatest plays, but the company tackled this thorny problem of marriage with real aplomb. Mark Digman as the Bishop, Olga Lindo as Mrs. George, with Alan McClelland as Hotchkiss, Dorothy Reynolds as Lesbia and Newton Blick as Collins, wrestled effectively with the Shavian debate. Pinero's play *The Thunderbolt* (September 12th) was the second production and a very excellent choice, for this work reveals the author at his best both as to the structure of his play and his manner of tackling the social background of his time. The story of the four Mortimore's attempts to lay their hands on the fortune of their dead brother is real theatre. The company, including Margaret Vines, Mark Digman, Roy Malcolm, Dorothy Reynolds, Marcus Insley, Julian D'Albie and Olga Lindo is outstandingly good.

The School for Scandal followed on September 21st, and here again the company is at its best in the type of play well suited to the atmosphere of the Arts Theatre. Margaret Vines is an altogether delightful Lady Teazle and Alec Clunes a handsome and romantic Charles. The final production of the Festival was *Hamlet* (October 10th), with Alec Clunes as the Prince. This *Hamlet* lacks bitterness, though his lines are finely spoken, and some of the rest of the company are undoubtedly miscast, though Mark Digman's Claudius is strongly etched and Olga Lindo's Queen a sympathetic rendering. Roy Malcolm appears to have misread the character of Polonius whom he makes stupid rather than tedious, and Dorothy Primrose's Ophelia does not come up to expectations in the mad scene. However, one can here see the tragedy practically in its entirety, which makes for a new understanding and fuller appreciation.

L.J.

MERCURY

"This Way to the Tomb"

RONALD Duncan, author of the second play in the series of new plays by poets to be produced at the Mercury Theatre, has cast his play in the form of a Masque and Anti-Masque, the first being a mystical study of the fasting and temptations of St. Antony of Santa Ferrata, and the second a 20th century satire on materialism in which an ignoble sect of

Right:

ALEC CLUNES

The thirty-three-year-old Director of the Arts Theatre Company, as Hamlet in the Arts Theatre Festival of English Drama.

hot-gossellers invade the scene of the saint's death and tomb, and assault him as an imposter when he appears to them through a miracle.

Although acknowledging a debt to the Ben Jonson form of masque, the play has much in common with the satiric style employed by Auden and Isherwood before the war. It has, however, a very different religious core and the first scene, static though the action is, reveals an intellect and command of language that grip the imagination with a drama of their own. But surely if poetry is to take the vital and popular place in the theatre it took in Elizabethan times our poets must learn to write not only in "highbrow" and mystical forms but to construct plays also which reveal the drama and the emotions of human beings and ordinary life? John Masefield's *Tragedy of Nan* is almost the only outstanding example of such a play in modern times. Nevertheless, Mr. Duncan reveals here a mind and talent of conspicuous quality which have inspired Benjamin Britten to compose some songs and unaccompanied choral music which must rank among his most beautiful work. Robert Speaight's lucidity of thought and diction were admirable in the part of St. Antony, the acting generally was on a high level, and the setting and lighting models of "little theatre" production.

A.W.

Kindsey Theatre Club

KINDSEY Theatre Club opened with *The Proposal* by Chekhov, with Richard Goolden playing the valetudinary suitor, followed by the first English performance of *The Winter of Our Discontent* by Maurice Maeterlinck.

The stage is very small and the audience finds itself closer to the actor than is customary in the English theatre. It is interesting to watch at close range so fine an actor as Richard Goolden getting his effects but one feels that one is being rather rude to stare. There is a point in the story of *The Proposal*, near the end, where the suitor goes into a faint or stupor from over-excitement, causing the other two characters to fear that he has died on them. In this production, by Paul Hardmuth, who also played the father, all three characters went into a faint or stupor simultaneously, bringing the action to a cessation. It was naturally difficult to get the play moving again in order to finish the script.



Angus McBean

It is with reluctance and extreme diffidence and an abject sensation of guilt and unworthiness, that I would venture to withhold praise from a writer of so great fame as Maurice Maeterlinck, whatever he did. Certainly I went to see *The Winter of Our Discontent* with considerable curiosity and keenly anticipating more enjoyment than the performance afforded. That so often happens that no criticism of author, producer or actors need be inferred. The interesting thing is that Maeterlinck does this thing and we are allowed to see it. For adding to our knowledge of Maeterlinck, we must feel grateful to Mr. Basil Ashmore for producing the play. There are only four characters and the theme is simple, subtle and intense—passionate love in as many different forms as may be contrived among three characters, for the fourth character is the merest cut-out and is so played. Maeterlinck presents a dramatic thesis to show that love and hate are parallel channels in the same stream of emotion and when the stream is in flood they overflow into each other. By the third act I began to think that Maeterlinck must have written this, after all. The play makes heavy demands upon the actors, who have to be emotional volcanoes, smouldering ominously when not in violent eruption. This style of acting must be wearying to the player, for it is unrelieved. The characters have no superficial foibles to make them appear credible, human, likeable or amusing. They have nothing but intense passion; so un-English.

An exciting list of famous but rarely acted plays is set forth for future presentation. For this the Lindsey deserves the prayers and support of all who care for the great names in English dramatic literature and for the future of the English theatre. H.M.

Anglo-Russian Ballet

THIS very small-scale company under the direction of Latisha Browne, its choreographer, gave a fortnight's season at the Lindsey Theatre, Notting Hill Gate, from 2nd October. Under such restricted conditions as regards staging and resources it is difficult to criticise too severely, especially since the starting of the venture, which has taken ballet to garrison and small theatres in the provinces, must have involved a good deal of hard work and courage. *Les Sylphides* is necessarily cramped under such circumstances and the smaller the theatre and the closer the audience to the stage the greater the demand for care in minor details of presentation, make-up and casting (which in this ballet is a matter of physique as much as talent). It is better to try to turn the limitations of the stage into an asset than to treat them as a necessary hindrance, and I'd like to see this group do this more than at present; for instance by softening the lighting, which is hard on both decor and dancers, by performing *Sylphides* against

plain screens or curtains instead of a poor backcloth, and devising ballets of simpler and more expressive idiom than the technical *divertissement* type, unsuited to a small floor space, now attempted.

As usual in this type of company, some Russian and Portuguese national dances (Judy Finch was excellent in these) came out best. The guest dancers, Raymond Farrell and Jeanne Artois, brought personality and a professional sense of style to their work, Miss Artois, though taller showing a remarkable physical resemblance to Markova, including her steely and delicate "points."

Ballerina

Gordon Anthony's new book of photographs of Margot Fonteyn has just been published by Home and Van Thal, at 21s. The book shows many hitherto unpublished portraits of the dancer who in England has most earned the title of "ballerina," several of the head studies being especially fine. With an interesting text by Eveleigh Leith, who writes with a balanced critical judgment and appreciation of her subject, this book is a valuable record of the dancer in some of her outstanding roles, although it is a pity that both Mr. Anthony's books on Margot Fonteyn should have been marred by wartime deficiencies of reproduction and paper. A.W.

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Success: How do you do, Lord Darlington? I won't let you know my daughter, you are far too wicked.

Scene from Act I, in the boudoir at Lord Windermere's house in London. *L. to R.*: Effie Jones as Lord Darlington, Dorothy Hyson as Lady Windermere, Patricia Dickson as Lady Agatha and Athene Seyler as the Duchess of Berwick.

“Lady Windermere's Fan”

AT THE HAYMARKET

LONDON has rarely seen such elegance as in this John Gielgud production of Wilde's play, which, with its brilliant Cecil Beaton decor, is a feast of the exquisite and spacious. Against such a luxurious background Wilde's polished wit is doubly satisfying and it is not surprising to learn that following the brilliant success of this revival H. M. Tennent, Ltd. have acquired from the Oscar Wilde estate the rights of *A Woman of No Importance* for production later on, and that a revival of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (we have grateful memories of the previous Gielgud revivals of this masterpiece) will follow.

The original production of *Lady Windermere's Fan* was at the St. James's Theatre in 1892, well within the memory of many of to-day's active playgoers, yet its chief charm now is that it must rank as a period piece, so wide is the gulf be-

tween the present morals and manners and those of the last decade of the nineteenth century. This fact has been recognised in the current revival, which takes great pains to stress the differences.

A talented cast takes full advantage of the stylised wit of Oscar Wilde, and the story of the society woman who was ostracised for her youthful moral slip in running away from her husband and child and who is later instrumental in saving her own daughter from a similar fate, is played out in the leisured spaciousness of the times. Isabel Jeans is the ideal Mrs. Erlynne and in a career of brilliant performances this probably tops them all. Athene Seyler as the Duchess of Berwick is another member of the cast who is obviously at home in the Wilde medium. This is indeed a production which the theatregoer of discrimination cannot afford to miss.

PICTURES BY CECIL BEATON



Lady Windermere: But you are not to say foolish, insincere things to people.
Lord Darlington: Ah, you are beginning to reform me. It is a dangerous thing to reform any one, Lady Windermere.

Lord Darlington, one of society's most eligible bachelors, is in love with Lady Windermere, who however, is happily married and far too loyal to her husband and child to listen to his protestations.

Duchess: Men become old, but they never become good.

The loquacious Duchess of Berwick has many witty things to say on life in general and men in particular.



Duchess: Agatha, darling!

Lady Agatha: Yes, mamma.

Duchess: Will you go and look over the photograph album that I see there?

The Duchess sends her daughter out of earshot while she enlightens the unsuspecting Lady Windermere of a scandal attaching to her husband, for it is common knowledge that Lord Windermere has been paying frequent calls on the notorious Mrs. Erlynne, whom society is refusing to recognise.

rd Windermere:
 ar honour is un-
 ched. Margaret.
 i don't think for
 moment that I...
 dy Windermere:
 think that you
 nd your money
 ngely, that is all.

e unhappy
 dy Windermere,
 o has found
 nfirmation of the
 chess's warn-
 g in her hus-
 ands' bank book,
 allenges him
 out Mrs. Er-
 ne. (Geoffrey
 one as Lord
 Windermere).



dy Windermere:
 out a friend to-
 t, Lord Darling-
 I didn't know
 ould want one
 so soon.

rd Windermere
 insisted on
 ating Mrs. Er-
 ne to their
 l and Lady
 ndermere, out-
 ged by the
 ggestion, has
 eatedened to in-
 t this unwanted
 est if she does
 eed accept the
 itation. As the
 sts assemble
 turns to Lord
 rlington with a
 y friendliness.





Lady Windermere: A useful thing, a fan, isn't it?

The dramatic moment of Mrs. Erlynne's arrival. Lady Windermere had threatened to strike her with her fan but decorum wins and the beautiful and mysterious Mrs. Erlynne joins the assembly. (Isobel Jeans as Mrs. Erlynne).



Lord Augustus: Dear lady, I am in such suspense! May I not have an answer to my request?

Lord Augustus Lorton (Michael Shepley), one of Mrs. Erlynne's many admirers, seeks her hand in marriage, a marriage which would, of course, give Mrs. Erlynne the social status she is seeking.



Lord Darlington: You are right. You have no courage: none.

Lord Darlington, who felt convinced that the blatant evidence of Lord Windermere's seeming unfaithfulness would drive Lady Windermere to leave her husband for him, is disappointed in his hopes.

Erlynn: You must leave this house once. Lord Darlington may return at any moment.

After that same night after a further quarrel with her husband about Mrs. *Erlynn* and Lady Windermere, heartbroken, leaves a note for Lord Windermere and goes to Lord Darlington's rooms. *Erlynn*, hearing of this, follows her and leads with her to return to her husband. "You don't know what it is to be despised, to be sneered at, to be an outcast," she says, but does not reveal that she is Lady Windermere's mother.



Mrs. Erlynn: I'm afraid I took your wife's fan in mistake for my own when I was leaving your house to-night

Mrs. Erlynn pushes Lady Windermere into hiding when Lord Darlington's friends (including Lord Windermere and Lord Augustus) arrive unexpectedly. In her haste, Lady Windermere leaves her fan behind to be discovered by the men, but *Mrs. Erlynn*, with supreme sang froid and knowing full well what interpretation will be placed on her actions, reveals herself, claims the fan and sweeps out of the room.



Lord Windermere : How pale you look.

Lady Windermere : I slept very badly.

Lord Windermere : My dear child. I am so sorry. I came in terribly late and I didn't like to wake you.

The next morning, Lord Windermere greets her husband in a chastened manner after her adventure of the night before.



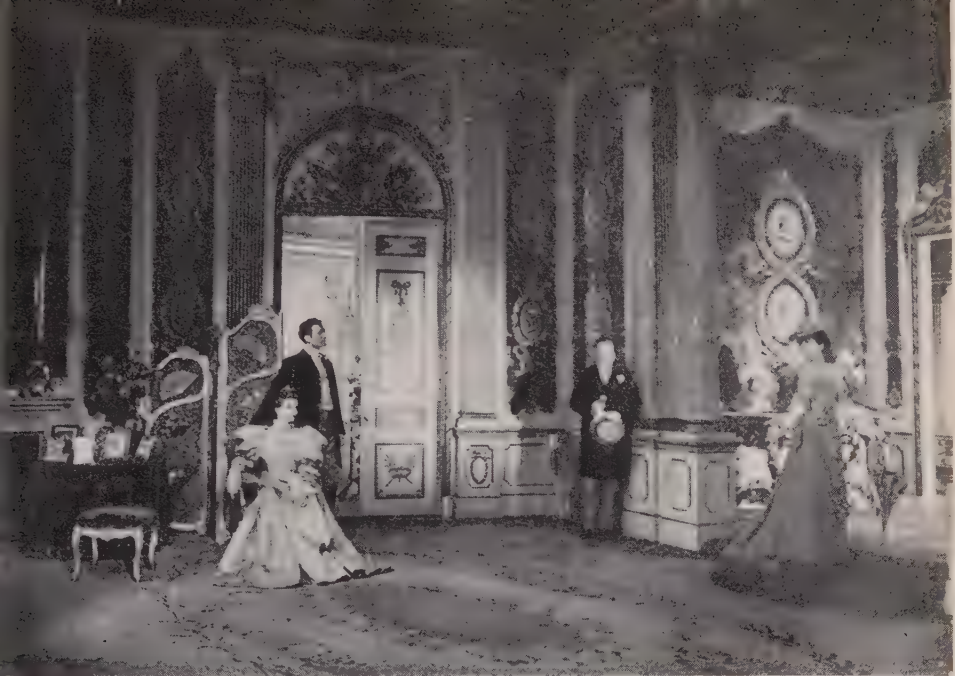
Mrs. Erlynne : So that is your little boy. What is he called?

Lady Windermere insists on seeing Mrs. Erlynne when she calls to return the favor for she has a new sense of gratitude and understanding for the woman who so magnificently saved her reputation.



Lady Windermere : Only once in my life have I forgotten my own mother.

Mrs. Erlynne hears from Lady Windermere about her mother, whom she believes long since dead and realises that she would destroy her own daughter's illusions by revealing her identity. (The real truth of her association with Lord Windermere was that he returned for her silence about her relationship with his wife, he paid her sums of money and assisted her to regain her place in society.)



Mrs. Erlynne: Lord Augustus, won't you see me to my carriage?

Lord Augustus calls and is obviously embarrassed to meet *Mrs. Erlynne* after the scandal of the previous night but is still patently under the spell of this fascinating woman. Lady Windermere has insisted on giving *Mrs. Erlynne* the fan which has become a secret bond between them, and there is a note of mischief in *Mrs. Erlynne's* voice when she insists that Lord Augustus should carry this significant object to her carriage.



Our last glimpse of the elegant *Mrs. Erlynne*, who leaves the *Windermere's* knowing at least that she has atoned in part for her early desertion of her daughter, who, though ignorant of their relationship, now holds her in esteem and affection.

"Henry IV"

PARTS I and II

● The Old Vic Theatre Company opened their new season, on September 25th, with a brilliant production of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* Part I, in which Ralph Richardson as Falstaff and Laurence Olivier as Hotspur scored big personal triumphs. In these pages we portray the leading players in *Henry IV* Parts I and II. *Oedipus Rex*, which followed with *The Critic*, on October 18th, has provided further evidence of the Company's unique and towering achievement.

PORTRAITS BY JOHN VICKERS



RALPH RICHARDSON

as

Sir John Falstaff

in Parts I and II



LAURENCE OLIVIER

as

Harry Hotspur

in Part I

Right:

SYBIL THORNDIKE

as

Mistress Quickly

in Parts I and II





MICHAEL WARRE
as Prince Hal
in Parts I and II



MARGARET LEIGHTON
as Lady Percy
in Parts I and II



JOYCE REDMAN
as Doll Tearsheet
in Part II



NICHOLAS HANNEN
as King Henry
in Parts I and II

In the News

Right: FLORA ROBSON, who has a strong role in *A Man About the House*, which opened at Derby, on October 15th. Miss Robson appears with Basil Sydney in this adaptation by John Perry of Francis Brett Young's well known novel.



FLORA ROBSON



John Vickers

VALERIE TAYLOR

who has taken over with distinction the part of Dilys Parry in Emlyn Williams's *The Wind of Heaven*, at the St. James's Theatre.

Right:

MARIE NEY

who is most welcome back among us after her wartime travels, is to appear in *The Trojan Women*, the second play to be presented by the Company of Four, at the Lyric, Hammersmith, on November 8th.



Angelo Studio, Cain

Soviet Theatre No. 20

Puppet Theatre

By A. KIPRENSKY

THE Central Puppet Theatre founded in Moscow in 1931 by Sergei Obraztsov is considered the best in the Soviet Union. Since its inception it has given about 6,000 performances and visited 127 cities of the Soviet Union.

Its first premiere *Jim and the Dollar* took place in 1932. This play stayed in the repertory until 1938 and ran 376 times. Since then the theatre has developed along broader lines gradually advancing from more or less primitive things to highly complicated classics like *Christmas Eve* from Gogol's story *Aladdin's Lamp—King of the Dear* by an Italian dramatist Carlos Gozzi—and now *Mowgli* (from Kipling's book *The Jungle*) which recently had its premiere.

The theatre makes use of all types of puppets, Punch and Judy marionettes and particularly hand manipulated puppets. The production is blended and unified by the skill of the actors and producers; there is beauty of design in the scenery, and the colour schemes show resourcefulness.

Attached to the Central Puppet Theatre is an extremely interesting museum which gives a picture of the history of the puppet theatre. Puppet-show is an ancient form of art. There is hardly a people in existence which does not have a puppet theatre in one form or another. The museum contains nearly all aspects of puppet art and all phases of its development. There are effigies of the Java Islanders, Japanese marionettes, Bengal puppets which are attached to a bamboo stick held by a person hidden behind the screen; marionettes from Iran which are manipulated in a very



Regisseur Victor Gromov at a rehearsal of *Mowgli*, at the Central Puppet Theatre.

(Photo by Ozersky)

primitive manner and Burma marionettes. There is quite a variety of European puppet exhibits, Italian puppets of the eighteenth century, Venetian marionettes, English puppets, a French "Guignol" theatre, Belgian puppets, and Spanish "La Tarumba." American puppets are also represented.

An important feature of the museum is the puppet theatre of pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union. There are old Russian "Balagan" (booth) puppet shows; Ukrainian and Byelorussian "Vertep" (den) puppets; Uzbek folk puppets and models of many puppet theatres existing in the Soviet Union. Extremely interesting is the Kiev puppet theatre founded by Soroka which gives shows in the Ukrainian and Jewish languages.

Before the war, the Soviet Union had 150 professional puppet theatres and a number of amateur puppet shows in schools, clubs and Red Army units. Foremost among them is the Leningrad puppet theatre directed by Dominni and the first Moscow Regional puppet theatre.

There are puppet theatres in nearly all National Republics and in all large cities of the U.S.S.R. Even in distant Kamchatka there is a State puppet theatre.

Below: Two scenes from puppet plays. Left: Princess Petutia and Jean in *Puss in Boots*, and right: Little Mowgli in the arms of bear Baloo. (Photos by Ozersky).





FREDDIE CARPENTER

WHEN the curtain goes up on *Big Boy*, sixteen of the most entrancing and talented young dancers ever to grace a West-End stage trip on to dust the Managing Director's Office and prepare it for the day's business. These Freddie Carpenter Dancers are very easy-on-the-eye. There is a girl to suit the taste of every young man in the audience, and every young woman will find at least one new tip concerning make-up or hair-do. They can dance as well as any team that came out of Broadway or Hollywood, and though the last word in glamour and sophistication, they can still hold the interest of the most discriminating dance critic.

Only a few weeks ago that same stage was starkly illuminated by a single blazing pilot light that would make Helen of Troy look as commonplace as Mrs. Mop. It was the time of auditions for the new show. Freddie Carpenter sat in the stalls and watched one applicant after another in drab practice dress doing a few steps under the cruel glare, but because he has an imaginative eye he knows how to pick winners, and he produced a chorus that has been favourably compared with that unforgettable generation of Mr. Cochran's Young Ladies, who formed the glamorous background to Delysia, Maisie Gay, Jessie Matthews, Tilly Losch and Nikitina, when the Pavilion was the most famous revue theatre in the world.

Holding an audition is not an easy job. Scores of girls are lined up for the dance producer's judgment, and in the space of

Auditions

by

ERIC JOHNS

seconds he has to make up his mind whether each one is to be retained or rejected. An applicant may look extremely plain under that hard unflattering light; she may be badly dressed; her make-up may be crude; her hair may not suit her face; but if the dance producer is gifted with an imaginative eye for talent he will know in an instant whether she can be an asset to the show. Provided her features are good, though not necessarily pretty in the conventional sense of the word, and her colouring is attractive, the girl has much in her favour, and the producer feels half his problem is solved.

When the girl walks on the stage for Freddie's approval, her figure and legs are given first consideration. Above all, the modern chorus girl must have beautiful limbs and a good figure. If she happens to be an excellent dancer, but cursed with legs reminiscent of the old-fashioned principal boy, she has to be rejected, as such curves are no longer in vogue and would not be tolerated by audiences used to admiring streamlined figures that have become such a familiar feature of Astaire films. During the course of the show the chorus girl will have to wear the most revealing clothes. Unlike the principals she will not be able to camouflage any defects with long dresses or wrist-length sleeves. There is no time to give any individual consideration to the chorus, who must be attractive at first sight, otherwise their dancing has no meaning for the audience.

Glamorous make-up soon transforms the dullest face into a thing of beauty, as long as the teeth are good and the hair is capable of responding to treatment. Bearing that in mind, the dance producer requests the girl to go through a few steps. She must have clean tap beats and a good sense of rhythm, allied to a natural grace, preferably acquired by ballet training. Even if her steps happen to be old-fashioned, the producer knows that she will be worth working on, and it will be a comparatively easy matter for him to mould her to his methods at rehearsal.

An audition is a nerve-racking ordeal for any girl. Much often depends on getting a job. The rent may be mounting up, and scores of rival competitors may make her feel sick with fear and far from her best when she steps on to that starkly lit stage to take her chance. Yet the producer knows in an instant if the girl can really dance, in spite of all the drawbacks of a

(Continued on page 28)



SADLER'S WELLS BALLET

“Giselle”

●Two delightful new studies of Margot Fonteyn and Robert Helpmann in *Giselle*. The Sadler's Wells Ballet Company is now on tour prior to an ENSA visit to Germany.

Pictures by Edward Mandinian

The Old Vic Theatre Company

THE SECOND SEASON

THE Old Vic company opened at the New Theatre on 26th September what shows signs of becoming their most exciting drama season to date. There is a special interest in the concurrent performances of *Henry IV* Parts I and II, since it is rare to have the Shakespearean histories played in such a way that the audience may follow the historical events and get thoroughly to know the characters in all their facets, and John Burrell's production and the acting generally give Shakespeare a living quality that is unusually refreshing. My personal reaction is that Part II is better produced than Part I, where there is overmuch shifting of scenery and where the company tend to lack "voice" for the copper-plated cadenzas of Shakespeare's verse; the notable exception being Laurence Olivier, who as Hotspur revealed less a voice than a full instrumentation of vibrancy and colour. This is a warm, quick-blooded, exceptionally human performance that gives the character a new charm and the slight stammer of a man whose eager spirit chafes against the chains of mere words. Ralph Richardson's Falstaff, a grand buffoon and rascalion in Part I, proceeds in Part II to a still richer understanding which can catch the sombre illumination of "Do not bid me remember mine end," and suggest, as Falstaffs do rarely, the attraction of the man for the Prince as well as the considerable brain behind the wit. Michael Warre is a light-weight Prince Hal but shows promise for the future when he has thrown off a few Olivier-like mannerisms. Harcourt Williams is the best Owen Glendower since Lewis Casson's lyric-intoxicated Prophet and Welsh Bard, and the taverners, headed by Sybil Thorndike as Mistress Quickly and Joyce Redman as an unglamourised Doll Tearsheet from the gutters of Southern Ireland, are abundantly alive though the accents suggest any *locale* but Eastcheap. Shallow and Silence are entertainingly played by Laurence Olivier and Miles Malleon, although Olivier just misses the touch of autumnal melancholy that Morland Graham, the best Shallow of our time, managed to convey through the senile humours of the prattle about death.

Sheridan's long-drawn-out theatrical joke, *The Critic*, is an odd choice to follow Sophocles' *Oedipus*, and excellently though it is performed, with a final sea-battle riotously produced by Miles Malleon and superbly decorated by Tanya Moiseiwitch,

and with Laurence Olivier showing further versatility as a bustling Mr. Puff of tip-tilted nose and appealing charm, it cannot fail to quench the flame of the preceding tragedy. And what a flame this is! The dramatic construction of the *Oedipus* is unequalled in Greek tragedy and anticipates Ibsen in its power to pile revelation on revelation until the whole tragic fabric of the past is laid bare and rended by a new anguish. Modern dramatic criticism, in over-emphasising Oedipus' lack of volition in a sin to which he is foredoomed by fate, seems to me to have missed the fact that the characters are still vividly drawn and bear a certain moral responsibility and guilt. Jocasta's dark sacrifice of her child, Oedipus' passionate temper which roused him to murder if not to intentional parricide, and to condemn the loyal Creon without a hearing, are paid in blood, and it is not for nothing that Aristotle named Oedipus as the ideal tragic hero, since with greatness and nobility of character he combined defects of temper and justice that helped to precipitate his own doom.

This seems to me dramatically realised in the present production, partly owing to some very fine acting which presents the characters as human beings of real variety and suffering, and partly to W. B. Yeats' prose dialogue which, though it lacks the rhythmic impulse of Prof. Gilbert Murray's verse translation, brings a quickened realism to the clash of personality. By setting the play back in time to the more primitive Greece of which Sophocles wrote Michel St. Denis, aided by a setting of extraordinary beauty and fatality by John Piper, has at the same time achieved a sense of darkening and malignant destiny which was lost in Reinhardt's more austere classical production, and Antony Hopkins' music intensifies the fate-charged atmosphere. I cannot imagine the Chorus of Priests, in which Yeats soars into lyric verse, more effectively yet simply produced or finely spoken, and here as elsewhere the costumes of Marie-Hélène Dasté show striking beauty of design and colour. Of an outstanding cast it is not, perhaps, invidious to single out Ralph Richardson's commanding and biting Tiresias, the blind Seer, Sybil Thorndike's agonised Jocasta, and Laurence Olivier's noble and flashing Oedipus, a performance of a passion, anguish and pathos that places him on the highest pinnacle among modern tragic actors. No lover of greatness in the theatre should miss this production. A.W.

Right: George Rigaud as Johann Strauss in Felix Brentano's production of *Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston*, the romantic comedy with music reviewed below.

BY OUR
AMERICAN
CORRESPONDENT
E.
MAWBY
GREEN



Echoes from Broadway

NEVER since *The Song of Norway* came in from the coast some twelve months ago, to capture New York with the magic of Edward Grieg's music, producers have been tracking the lives and works of other celebrated composers for an angle on which to build a Broadway production. The first to come rushing in was last season's catastrophic *Rhapsody*, which slowed up its backers to the tune of \$300,000 and did everything except enhance the charm of Fritz Kreisler's music. This may have stumped temporarily the growth of some production plans but courage and enthusiasm returned when the film *A Song To Remember* got the town going ecstatic again over Jose Iturbi's brilliant playing of Chopin's compositions. Now already in the anguish of rehearsal is *Polanaise* which, of course, means more Chopin, and in addition Jan Kiepura and Marta Eggerth. Tchaikowsky is being talked of to form the background of three productions and Mendelssohn is mentioned by another manager.

Neither have the possibilities of the Strauss been overlooked. Felix Brentano recently brought in *Mr. Strauss Goes To Boston*, which was expected to see the new season off to a sparkling beginning. That it

began with only the faintest glimmer and dashed our expectations is the regrettable report.

There was plenty of promise in the initial idea of having a young and handsome Johann Strauss visit Boston in 1872 for an American tour of concert conducting, only to find himself swamped by the swooning female population while he, for commercial reasons, must pass himself off as a bachelor; but the promise was broken shortly after the exposition in the first scene. No one seemed to know just how to expand the idea into a gay and frothy entertainment. We expected to be caught up in a whirl of Strauss music and sweeping waltzes instead we were bogged down with interminable doses of dull dialogue which echoed the operettas of yesteryear.

Too few of the beloved Strauss melodies found their way into the proceedings. Such favourites as the "Blue Danube" and "Tales From Vienna Woods" were practically ignored in favour of the lesser known "Midnight Waltz" and "Coloratura Waltz." The intention undoubtedly was to keep things fresh and unhackneyed but it backfired. Nothing can be more banal than to get your leading lady drunk on her

first glass of champagne and have her burst into the "Laughing Waltz." However, we were spared seeing her wrinkle up her nose and say, "Bubbles—they tickle."

Robert Stolz has supplemented the Strauss music with some of his own but the lilt and inspiration of his famous "Two Hearts In Three-Quarter Time" is missing. He has two nice little pieces, "Who Knows?" and "Going Back Home," but these are not sufficient in scope to bolster the anemic Strauss selection.

Making his American stage debut in the role of Johann Strauss is the good-looking French actor George Rigaud. He has come from Hollywood fresh from finishing *Paris Underground* with Constance Bennett and Gracie Fields. He is a strange choice for a musical comedy lead since he does not sing or dance. Doubtless his accent and appearance were the determining assets that put him in the part. Virginia MacWatters, as the Boston Debutante who falls hard for

the visiting composer, exhibits a fine coloratura but also displays a colourless personality. The elaborately bustled costumes by Walter Florell were individually striking but somehow managed to clash with each other and the expensive but uninspired Stewart Chaney settings. The loveliest thing to look at on stage was Ruth Matteson as Hetty Strauss, the understanding wife.

The subordination of the Strauss music to a bad book is the key to the failure of *Mr. Strauss Goes To Boston*. Actually the book and lyrics are only a couple of shakes worse than those of *The Song of Norway* but the latter triumphs magnificently because the Grieg music is given full play and is sung to the hilt. It is with no small curiosity that we await the Chopin and Tchaikowsky productions. The task of fitting a libretto to these great composers is not an easy one. The successful book is yet to appear. Perhaps someone might try telling the truth.



“Rhapsody in Blue”

SCREEN VERSION OF
GEORGE GERSHWIN'S
LIFE OPENS AT THE
WARNER THEATRE,
LEICESTER SQUARE,
ON NOVEMBER 2nd.

● Above: Anne Brown, for six years the stage “Bess” of George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*, sings “Summertime” from this opera in Warner Bros. film on the famous composer’s life. Robert Alda, a newcomer, plays the part of Gershwin, with Joan Leslie and Alexis Smith as his leading ladies, while a number of well known personalities, including Paul Whiteman, Al Jolson and Oscar Levant appear as themselves in this story of Gershwin’s rise from obscurity to world-wide fame.

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Whispers from the Wings

BY
LOOKER ON

A CROSS-SECTION of the present boom-audiences packing West-End theatres reveals the fact that a large percentage of playgoers consists of men celebrating overseas leave or having a final fling before settling down to what may prove humdrum civilian life.

At such a moment Sybil Thorndike, the greatest tragedienne of our time, decides to add Jocasta to her Greek repertoire, already distinguished by memorable performances of Medea and Hecuba. Is this a propitious time to revive *Oedipus Rex* and tell the story of an incestuous queen who hanged herself, to say nothing of her tragic son who unwittingly killed his father, married his mother, and spent his last days in blindness? I was anxious for Dame Sybil's opinion on the decision to produce the Sophocles tragedy in such a world of misery and unrest.

"Now is the right moment for Greek tragedy," she said. "It is symbolic of great moods of crises, and we are living in a world of crises. *Oedipus Rex* is a perfect reflection of our own world, even though the original production dates as far back as 431 B.C.

In *Oedipus* people are troubled because disease ravages the country. They do all they can to discover the root cause. They look here; they look there; and try one suggestion after another in the hope of ripping off the externals and probing to the core of evil. Is that not a perfect reflection of the state of Europe to-day, suffering from spiritual and moral plague? All sorts of opinions are put forward in an attempt to discover a solution. Hitler is blamed. The Nazi doctrine is said to be the cause, or maybe it is all due to Fascism. The German people are accused by others who wish to exterminate the race. It is just another case of history repeating itself and proves that when it comes to living such truths, we are no wiser than the Ancient Greeks.

The Yeats version of *Oedipus* we are playing at the New is peasant in feeling, and ends on a note of pessimism which perfectly mirrors our own time. "The dead can feel no pain." That line took on a new meaning when I thought of our recent visit to Belsen where one saw poor wretches who had survived. In Hamburg people were living under rusty sheets of corrugated iron, trying to keep body and soul together in a desert of devastation which has to be seen to be realised. At such times one could only feel that those who had died had been fortunate. What



DAME SYBIL THORNDIKE

has played in Greek tragedy from the early days of her distinguished career. Here, she is seen as Medea in *Medea*, at the Holborn Empire, in 1920.

profound, terrible truth in that line from *Oedipus*—"The dead can feel no pain."

The great roles of Greek tragedy link one with Eternal Things. They are large-size and deeply symbolic. In the character of Oedipus we see a man punished beyond his desert—a spectacle which gives us, as in *Lear*, that feeling of horror and pity which Aristotle has expressed so admirably in the *Poetics*.

The Greeks understood drama better than anyone except Shakespeare. They were masters of technique and superb story tellers. They knew just how much to tell an audience and how much to withhold in order to make their plays an exciting experience. There are moments in Greek tragedy when

(Continued on page 28)

The Vaudeville Theatre,

1870—1945

by
A. F. M. BEALES

THE Strand has always been one of London's most important, but least imposing thoroughfares—but in the second half of last century it was Theatreland and Restaurantland to the average Londoner and London visitor.

The Vaudeville Theatre, which celebrates its seventy-fifth birthday this year, is still the youngest legitimate theatre in the Strand. It was built by Wybrow Robertson, the husband of Marie Litton the actress, to designs by C. J. Phipps, one of the best-known theatre architects of the time, on the sites of Nos. 403 and 404, Strand, previously occupied by the Bentick Club and the officers of a paper known as *The Glow Worm*.

The Vaudeville has only 'known' two ownerships in its lifetime and the original management was a triumvirate of young actors, all under 35 years of age, H. J. Montague, David James and Thomas Thorne.

The opening on 16th April 1870 coincided with that of another London theatre, the New Chelsea (afterwards known as the Court Theatre) in Sloane Square. The programme consisted of a comedy *For Love Or Money*, and a Burlesque, *Don Carlos Or The Infante in Arms*, and an address, written by Shirley Brooks, the Editor of *Punch*, was spoken by Montague.

The new theatre, was much admired and a special feature of the interior decoration included "an act-drop in the Grecian style, painted by George Gordon."

Montague seceded from the management in the following year, James and Thorne continuing the partnership until 1882, when James dropped out, leaving Thorne as sole lessee for another ten years.

An early success was James Albery's comedy *The Two Roses*, in which Henry Irving established himself as an actor entitled to rank amongst the best on the London stage at that time. This play ran for 294 performances, which was counted as an outstandingly long run in those days. One wonders why it was withdrawn within so short a reach of the three-hundred mark! The 250th performance was given as a Benefit for Irving.

In July 1872, a revival of *The School For Scandal* attained, and still holds, the record run for this play with 404 performances.

But all previous successes in the history of the English stage were left far behind by the record of H. J. Byron's comedy *Our Boys*. This ran from 16th January 1875 until 18th April 1879, with a total of 1,362 performances, and was the first play ever to pass the five-hundred mark. Pascoe tells us that "The management doubtless

unwilling to damage the reputation of so admirable a play by giving the public too much of it, erased it from the bills." One wonders how many present-days managements would be equally strong-minded in the face of a popular success!

In 1884 Henry Arthur Jones' *Saints and Sinners* caused considerable controversy. This was an early attempt at a "problem play" and on the first night a section of the audience objected to the use of Biblical quotations.

Between 1888 and 1891 Cyril Maude scored some of his earlier successes here. In 1891 Ibsen's *Rosmersholme* and *Hedda Gabler* were given their first performances in this country, at Matinees. Elizabeth Robins played Hedda.

In the same year the facade was remodelled and extended and the interior redecorated.

Thorne gave up the management in 1892

ELLALINE TERRIS

appeared many times at the Vaudeville, and *The Catch of the Season*, in 1904, with 621 performances, was one of the big successes of this theatre.



after twenty-two years; the brothers Agostino and Stefano Gatti took over, and the Vaudeville has remained in their family ever since. The present owners of the theatre are J. R. Gatti and his nephew Captain Jack Gatti, who is the grandson of the original Agostino Gatti. They are among the very few theatre proprietors who still direct the fortunes of their own theatre.

About 1896 farces "from the French" were gaining popularity with the public, and in this year Charles Klein's *A Night Out* met with enormous success and scored 531 performances.

In 1900 there began a long association with Seymour Hicks and his wife Ellaline Terris. *The Catch of the Season* was an enormous success with 621 performances in 1904, and 1905 and this was followed by *The Belle of Mayfair*. In the cast of these plays was Camille Clifford, the celebrated 'Gibson Girl,' and during the run of

the Belle of Mayfair she persuaded the management to have her name in lights beside the theatre. Edna May objected to this, and her subsequent resignation from her part caused a newspaper sensation. So in the latter play was Gladys Cooper, making her first West End appearance.

The next outstanding stage personality associated with the Vaudeville was Charles Swtrey, who appeared in 1907 and 1908 in several successes.

Between 1916 and 1923 Andre Charlot produced his intimate revues here, all of which were given short 'snappy' titles. One of these, *Buzz-Buzz* secured the record for this type of entertainment, with 612 performances, and held it until *Sweeter and Lower*, now at the Ambassadors, passed it at total.

The last performance in the old building took place on 7th November, 1925 and the theatre was rebuilt.

The architect was Robert Atkinson and the work was carried out in the amazingly short time of fifteen weeks, which was a remarkable achievement, considering that the original building was gutted; the roof raised, part of the basement lowered, the orchestra enlarged, new stairways built, and the stage and auditorium reconstructed. The new theatre was oblong instead of horse-shoe shaped as before; the front elevation was retained and a new back elevation was erected in Maiden Lane.

The re-opening took place on 23rd February, 1926, with Archie de Bear's revue *R.S.V.P.*



ANDRE
CHARLOT

famous for his intimate revues, was associated with the Vaudeville between 1916 and 1923, during which time *Buzz-Buzz* was one of his big successes.

Many successful productions have taken place at the Vaudeville during the last fifteen years which bring us to the present fraction, Esther McCracken's *No Medals*, which looks as if it may well equal one of the many long-run records for which the theatre has been famous.

Amongst famous players who have made their first appearances on the West End stage at the Vaudeville are Eva Moore, H. Hoey, Gladys Cooper, Nicholas Hannen, Lillie Banks, Gertrude Lawrence, Frank Eyton and Coral Browne.



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Auditions (Continued from page 20)

audition. She is not asked to do very much; the normal chorus audition is not a lengthy business. Full allowance is made for nerves; after all, nerves are incapable of concealing a girl's line and figure from the discerning eye. The expert ear also knows whether she is sounding her beats or not.

Girls are apt to look wooden on such occasions, being too scared to think of anything but beats and getting through the ordeal. Freddie, knowing how much their smile means to the audience, never rests until he has seen it. He wins their confidence, as a good photographer does; the frightened look melts away, as they respond to a word of encouragement with a warm smile. In an instant he knows whether they are suitable to "spread a little happiness" in his show.

Even though a girl's legs are just as beautiful whether she is nervous or not, she will, if she is clever, make them as alluring as possible with suntan lotion. In moments of nervous tension flesh is apt to turn a ghastly white which is most unbecoming under the cruel working light, and at other times limbs turn blue with cold, which is not a pretty sight either. The experienced girl knows how to stand properly so that her legs always appear to good advantage.

She also practises a good walk, even if only a dozen steps, and knows how to hold herself, so that she makes a favourable first impression upon the management sitting in the stalls, thereby winning them to her side from the moment they set eyes on her. She needs to keep her wits about her. If they are looking for tall dancers and she is no more than average stature, she has to give the impression of height by lifting her chin an inch or two. She likewise chooses a good practice costume, and never wears stripes if she happens to be on the plump side. There are a hundred-and-one tips used by girls who know the ropes. The dance producer knows them, too; but if they pass him they will certainly be accepted by the public.

Oddly enough, fifteen-year-old girls usually look older on the stage than their elder sisters of twenty-three. As youngsters still have a certain amount of puppy flesh, they find it more difficult than their seniors to acquire a nineteen-inch waist. Managements in search of a youthful chorus invariably choose girls in the twenties, rather than in the teens. The chorus girl in demand to-day is the one who looks sophisticated, rather than childishly young.

The Freddie Carpenter Dancers are faced with a tougher job than the Cochran Young Ladies of the Pavilion Era. In those palmy days C. B. Cochran spent a fortune on adorning them with the most beautiful

fabrics in the world. The Carpenter Dancers have to gain the same effect in an age of rationing, when each girl is only allowed two pairs of shoes for each production, no matter what plot or costumes may rightfully demand. The Cochran Young Lady would have been given a dozen different pairs to slip on during the evening. So the Carpenter girls deserve a feather in their jaunty little caps for gaining the same effect in his age of austerity, and creating beauty with so little assistance from the dressmakers, who, nevertheless have performed miracles of ingenuity with the limited material at their disposal. The enchanted public have no idea what headaches have been endured in order to produce such glamour for their entertainment.

There is some justification for the old audition system, after all, when it brings forth sixteen such lovely girls as we see in *Big Boy*. Like school examinations, it has been decried as unfair, but without any suggestion of a suitable alternative. With so imaginative a producer as Freddie Carpenter, who is also an ace talent-spotter, an audition is capable of producing a bevy of beauty, which, if not a joy for ever, promises to be a joy for as long as *Big Boy* packs the Saville.

Whispers from the Wings

(Continued from page 25)

the tension is almost unbearable, a quality rarely found in modern plays.

I consider *The Skin of our Teeth* the most exciting of all recent plays, as it is set in the Greek mould, and so admirably reflects the mood of our age. It puts one outside Time, as the Greeks do. One is conscious of something bigger than man-made time. There is a suggestion of God looking on and viewing all our petty human emotions from a place of knowledge above. Yet, characters in Greek plays are not just helpless puppets of the Gods. Oedipus is not the victim of Fate. His disaster is largely the result of his own weakness. One feels he had the freedom and power to make his life other than it was. There is no suggestion of predestination about Greek tragedy.

Never shall I forget the Welsh miner who came to me after a performance of *Medea* in one of the colliery towns. "This is the play for us," he said. "It kindles the fire." Drama exists to kindle the fire, and that is why Greek tragedy is always topical, even in a world as unsettled as ours. Lads in the Forces are eager to see it. We have proved over and over again that they do not necessarily demand that their theatre provides obvious escapism. Of course, light plays have their place in the world of entertainment, but above all it seems to me that the troops prefer plays that give them a point of view and lasting food for thought."

Deon Theatres

SUCCESS OF BRITISH FILMS

The eighth annual general meeting of Deon Theatres Limited was held recently in London, Mr. J. Arthur Rank (the chairman) presiding. The following is an extract from his circulated statement:

The consolidated profit and loss account shows a trading profit of £2,442,427, a decline compared with the previous year of £373,503, due to the decrease in attendances in the London and Home Counties area during the period when the country was being subjected to attacks by flying and rocket bombs. After the cessation of these attacks attendances began to improve and since the close of the financial year takings show an increase over the corresponding period not only of last year, but of 1943. The directors recommend a dividend on the Ordinary shares of 25 per cent., less tax.

We have been fortunate in that few of our properties have been destroyed by enemy action. We have had five theatres totally destroyed and four closed owing to serious damage. Regardless of the horrors which occurred day and night, our theatres have remained open in every part of the country throughout the whole of the war years. We have collected on behalf of various war charities in excess of £450,000, and, with the help of the public, 540,000 periodicals have been handed over to welfare organisations of the Services. The theatres have been made available for lectures and film screening for the training of troops. We feel we can say, therefore, that we have played our part.

We have made great progress in the last two or three years in making pictures in the British studios and, while having British flavour and characteristics, they are of high entertainment value and have been great box-office successes. I feel that I should make special mention of Henry VIII, one of the finest films ever seen.

The results have been most encouraging, for the amounts they have taken at the box-office have been equal to, and in many cases exceeded, those of the product which we get from our Hollywood competitors. These films are playing also in many parts of the world, including India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and China. We are keeping abreast with all new developments and innovations, and ensuring an adequate supply of films and equipment.

I am satisfied that under the established and stable management by which your company is operated it can look forward to the future with quiet confidence. The report was adopted.

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Amateur Stage

TO those with longer memories, the travelling theatre which Miss Eleanor Elder toured in Britain for the Arts League of Service, for nearly a score of years from 1919, remains a pleasant proof that much entertainment can be secured from little means. With the authority of that experience, Miss Elder is supremely qualified to introduce *Entertain Yourself*, a half-a-crown volume from the National Council of Social Service conveying suggestions to amateurs for combining music, drama and the arts. Advocating the cultivation of this "combined arts" programme, with short plays or sketches mixed with musical and other items, this valuable little book sets the inexperienced on the right road to doing it.

The method adopted is to give leading guidance on the main divisions of such a programme, supplementing each section with a specialised bibliography for the reader to pursue his search for knowledge. It is reassuring to find this book including a concise legal section, which answers many of the points often raised by the innocent. The amateur, with such a volume in his hands, has no excuse for such evasions of copyright and similar lapses of which in the past he has sometimes been guilty.

* * *

The Querulous Queens is the title of a new one-act comedy for women, by Madge Pemberton, published by Deanes at 1s. 3d. It is a period play, making good fun of that Victorian writer Agnes Strickland and the liberties she took with the Queens of England, who return to confront her. Costume, therefore, is called for, but for those women's groups prepared to make the little effort in staging this play should be well worth while.

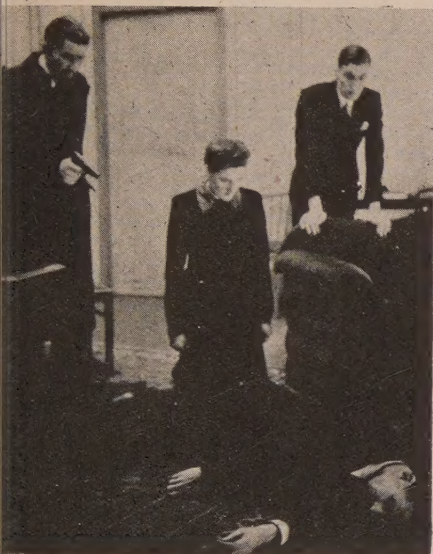
Ruislip Dramatic Society celebrated its coming of age this year with *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Thark*. This active group has carried on during the war, it has a music circle and junior section for training the young idea; and has in hand *Flare Path* for November 21st-24th and 1066 *And All That* for the New Year. New male acting members are needed—apply to the Secretary, at 25 St. Martin's Approach, Ruislip.

(Continued on page 32)

FOR SALE. Dec., 1935-Aug., 1945, "Theatre World," complete except March, 1938, June and September, 1939, July and Nov., 1941, June, 1942, and December, 1944. Very good condition. Best offer, Miss Angus, 5, Eslington Road, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

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Army Theatre Club



Some interesting details have reached us of a Theatre Club formed among members of the Q.Q. British Army of the Rhine, which is lucky enough to have at its disposal the beautifully equipped Kur Theatre (seating 600) in Bad Oeynhausen. The Club has a nucleus of peacetime professional actors and it is planned to run productions at regular intervals during the Occupation. A scene from the Club's first production, Mordaunt's *The Green Bay Tree*, is shown above, with L-R: Major St. John Tayleur as Mr. Owen, Subaltern Patricia Mears as Leonora Yale, Capt. Paul Hayward as Julian and Major Jack Ayling as Mr. Dulcimer (on ground). L/Bombardier Ronald Barker produced the play, which drew good audiences for a week, and was, incidentally, the first production of an English play with a British cast to take place in a German theatre since 1939.

Boomerang was the second play and other productions listed are *The Middle Watch*, *The Training Hour* and *The Cuckoo in the Nest*. It is obvious that our forces have not lost their wartime interest in the drama.

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Mavis Ward Players, Brighton, are continuing their productions at the Pavilion Theatre, with a new play *Running Lather* as one of the forthcoming plays.

Sally Lunn, a first play by Leo Walmsley, was staged at Bradford Civic Playhouse under the direction of Miss Esme Church. This play about Yorkshire fisherfolk was acted by amateur members of the Playhouse group.

An average of five plays a year for six years is the wartime record of the Reading Repertory Company, which gives a fortnight's run to each play in its own "70" Theatre. The Company is now in a stronger position artistically and financially than it has ever been and full houses have shown appreciation for such plays as *Tartuffe*, *Thunder Rock*, *Distant Point*, *Noah*, *Dear Brutus* and *Ghosts*.

The Northern Polytechnic Repertory Company's new programme of one play a month was carried a stage further with four performances of Elizabeth McFadden's psychological thriller *Double Door*, at the Northern Polytechnic Theatre, from the 11th-13th October. The response from the public was most encouraging, the ticket receipts being the highest in the Company's history, whilst the bookings for the next production, J. B. Priestley's *Music at Night*, from 8th-10th November, indicate that this record will be broken. The Company would welcome applications for membership from experienced males.

RAPHAEL TUCK & SONS

INCREASED DEMAND FOR PUBLICATIONS

The 44th Annual General Meeting of Raphael Tuck and Sons, Ltd., was held recently in London.

Mr. Desmond Tuck, chairman and joint managing director, said it was only now that he was allowed to report that on 29th December, 1940, the bulk of the company's premises and all they contained were destroyed. Consummation of definite plans for the future could not be proceeded with until industry knew more closely where it stood. The millstone of E.P.T. and taxation generally hung around its neck. There was a limit to what could be achieved by taxation.

Never within his recollection had the demand for Greeting Cards, which included Christmas, Birthday, Valentine, Easter and general occasion cards, been greater than in these war years. Without question the British public had become more greeting-card-minded than ever before.

In trade overseas the company had always played a leading part. There were few, if any, parts of the globe where the name of Raphael Tuck was not known.

In conclusion, the chairman pleaded for greater consideration for those who had suffered the loss of their plants and buildings through enemy action. Surely, he said, just as those who had been bombed out of their private homes a rightful priority claim to Government support, so had those who had been bombed out of their business homes.

The report was adopted.

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(For time of Performances see Announcements in the Press)

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